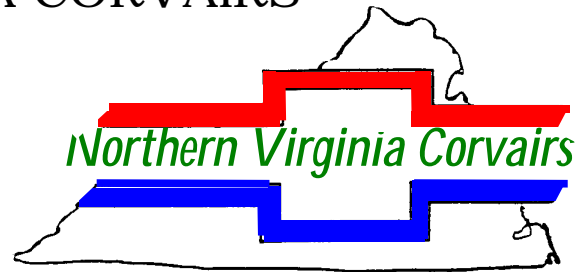


# NORTHERN VIRGINIA CORVAIRS



**HOT  
AIR  
MAIL**



NVCC, CORSA Chapter 220

Volume XXV, Number 4

April 2008

## CHAPTER CHATTER

By A. J. Paluska, Jr

As most of the regular readers of this authoritative automotive journal will concede your editor often mentions the weather in his monthly columns. The reason for this is that most of our club meetings are held outdoors so that rain is a definite tech session downer. Additionally, most members don't like to drive their Corvairs in the rain because most are garaged and they don't want or need to have to clean them after a ride in the rain. Why do I mention these facts? I really wanted to drive my Corvair to the March meeting as it is a nice 45 mile round trip and it lets me give the Monza a good bit of exercise, but I didn't want to have to do it in the rain.

The forecast for the week preceding the meeting was for rain Friday into Saturday. As of Thursday it didn't look too good, but the forecast on Friday indicated that the rain would be gone by midnight. As it turned out, it was quite a nice morning for host Ron Tumolo and the crew to bolt up the transmission to the engine he had rebuilt for his 1964 Monza restoration.

All was going well until the throw out bearing was to be put in. There wasn't any trouble placing it in but it was the considered opinion of those present Mike Puglisi, Greg Walthour, Darrin Hartzler, and

new member "Greek" Dunigan, that it would be better to put in a new one. Ron didn't get a new one as the old one looked good, but the judgement the group prevailed. The backup plan was to strip another engine so that is what the group accomplished. All usable parts will be traded or sold.

The club purchased T-shirts have been selling at a brisk pace. We have already sold four of them.

In lieu of the purchase of CORSA memberships for NVCC club members that are not currently CORSA members, the club donated \$250 to the CORSA General Fund.

Contact Darrin Hartzler to purchase 2008 Vair Fair Raffle car tickets. See the ad on Page 2. Our club exchanges newsletters with 36 other CORSA affiliated clubs. Editors often use material copied from other club's newsletters. (What? You think that I write all of this interesting stuff myself! Ed.) The ad for the 2008 Vair Fair raffle car appearing in the HAM has been reproduced in *The Oil Drop*, the newsletter of the Vulcan Corvair Enthusiasts, so Darrin may be receiving calls from some Corvair owners from the Birmingham, Alabama area! Roll Tide!

### 2008 NVCC Officers

**President:**

Bryan Blackwell  
6329 Hillside Road  
Springfield, VA 22152  
(703) 569-6908  
[bryan@skiblack.com](mailto:bryan@skiblack.com)

**Vice President:**

Ron Tumolo  
905 North Amelia Street  
Sterling, VA 20164  
(703) 430-6582  
[rvtum@verizon.net](mailto:rvtum@verizon.net)

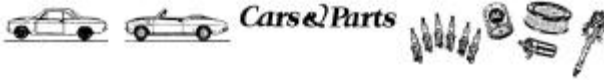
**Treasurer:**

Darrin Hartzler  
8214 Beech Tree Drive  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
(301) 365-7332  
[dhartzler@ifc.org](mailto:dhartzler@ifc.org)

**Secretary/Editor:**

A. J. Paluska, Jr  
6839 Brimstone Lane  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039  
(703) 250-4455  
[ajr13@earthlink.net](mailto:ajr13@earthlink.net)

The Northern Virginia Corvair Club (NVCC) publishes the HOT AIR MAIL newsletter monthly as a service to its members. NVCC is a non-profit chapter of the Corvair Society of America (CORSA). The \$10 annual dues are payable January 1st, to "Treasurer, NVCC" at the address herein. A prorated amount of \$5 is accepted for periods of less than six months. All other correspondence and submissions can be addressed to the Secretary/Editor. Newsletter expiration date is three months beyond dues anniversary if they are not current. Original material appearing in the HOT AIR MAIL may be reprinted in other non-profit publications with appropriate credits.



**\*\*\*AUTOMOTIVE CLASSIFIED\*\*\***

**63 Greenbrier:** Powerglide, white/blue exterior with blue interior. 115, 000 miles, runs well, good condition, no rust through, a few rust spots. Manuals included. \$2500.00. Call Jeremy at (703) 964-6999 (4/06)

**63 Convertible:** Red with good body and nice paint. Asking \$2500.00, condition 3 to 4 on scale of 5. Contact Jim at (540) 465-5066. (9/06)

**64 Coupe:** F&A Auto Sales at (804) 224-0588. (9/07)

**65 Convertible:** 140 HP PG, 44K miles, maroon and black. \$15000 OBO. Call Bob at (304) 263-2763. (7/07)

**Parts/Miscellaneous For Sale**

**Parts:** From our club's 65 coupe parts car: Right hand door, 4 Monza Wheel disks. Call Venice Cox at (703) 791-6517. (1/05)

**Parts:** Darrin Hartzler has parts to clear out this spring. Does anybody need either a transaxle or a complete PG with transaxle? How about a late model 3 speed manual transmission? If so, let him know. Very cheap. (301) 365-7332 (2/06)

**WANT A "NEW" CORVAIR FOR \$5.00?**

If you do, now is the opportunity to try your luck by trying to win the 2008 Vair Fair Raffle Car currently being prepared by the Tidewater Corvair Club. Tickets are \$5.00 each, Call Darrin Hartzler at (301) 365-7332 or [dhartzler@ifc.org](mailto:dhartzler@ifc.org).

**COMING SOON:** 2007 Vair Fair T-shirts. To be priced for quick sale. Another can't miss opportunity to own rare Corvair Memorabilia!

**Corvair Parts:** Large parts lot available. Will not be sold separately. For information contact Kim at [kimpjasonp@juno.com](mailto:kimpjasonp@juno.com) or [whitetiger@hereintown.net](mailto:whitetiger@hereintown.net).

**Corvair Vendors and Services**

Clark's Corvair Parts, Inc.  
Route 2, 400 Mohawk Trail, Shelburne Falls, MA  
01370-9748 (413) 625-9776

Corvair Underground  
PO Box 339 Dundee, OR 97115  
(503) 434-1648 or (800) 825-VAIR

Corvair Ranch, Inc  
1079 Bon-Ox Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325  
(717) 624-2805

**NVCC Calendar**

**19 April 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular NVCC meeting at the home of Mike Puglisi. **CHANGE**

**2-4May 2008: 29th Annual Virginia Vair Fair,** Tidewater Corvair Club. The George Washington Inn and Conference Center, Williamsburg, VA.

**17 May 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular NVCC meeting at the home of Darrin Hartzler. **CHANGE**

**21 June 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular meeting at the home of Ron Tumolo.

**19 July 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular meeting at the home of Venice Cox.

**23-27 June 2008, CORSA International Convention,** CORSA West of Los Angeles, Ventura, CA.

**16 August 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular meeting at the home of Steve MacLeod.

**19 September 2008, 9:00 AM:** The regular meeting at the home of Bill King. (TBR)

**Next Regular Meeting:**

**Saturday, 19 April 2008, 9:00 AM**

Mike Puglisi  
5016 Flanders Avenue, Kensington, MD  
(301) 942-2396

**Directions:** Map/directions on the mailing cover.

**Treasurer's Report:**

Balance (2/25/08)	\$3,328.19
Dues	\$120.00
T-shirt Sales	\$32.00
Interest	\$0.27
T-shirt Costs	(\$398.48)
HAM Supplies	(\$26.00)
CORSA Donation	(\$250.00)
Closing Balance (3/25/08)	\$2,805.98

Reprinted from *Live Journal* on the Internet.

### **Rebel yell. (Continued from February 2008)**

By 1963 these lawsuits reached the attention of a young attorney named Ralph Nader. Nader saw the Corvair (and the Beetle) as prime examples of an auto industry that put costs ahead of safety -- the eventual revelation that GM had omitted the vital front anti-roll bar to save a few dollars becoming a case in point. Nader saw the makings of a *cause celebre*, which resulted in his 1965 book, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, the first chapter of which, "The Corvair Story," was also published in the November 1965 issue of *The Nation*. Nader's book became a rallying cry that was picked up by politically minded people like New York State Senator Edward Speno and Dr. William Haddon, Jr., head of the New York Department of Public Health. It became the spark that ignited a crusade for legislative standards for automotive safety.

Even before this debate emerged Chevrolet made some gradual steps towards addressing the Corvair's handling problems. For the 1962 model year a heavy-duty suspension option became available that added the front anti-roll bar, as well as limiting straps on the rear swing arms to restrict their more radical camber changes. This was not a complete solution, but it took the teeth out of the snappish tail. These changes were an extra-cost option in '62 and '63, and finally became standard in 1964. Also in '64, a transverse leaf spring (known as a *camber compensator*) was added in the rear suspension. The leaf spring served to support part of the weight of the tail, allowing the normal springs to be softened, with a consequent reduction in the rear roll stiffness and propensity to oversteer. The '64 Corvair's handling was not perfect, but it was improved to the point where it was no more treacherous than any other American passenger car of its time.

The Corvair's straight-line performance, meanwhile, received a significant boost with the introduction of the turbocharged Monza Spyder in 1962. This was only the second turbocharged engine ever offered in a production car; the first was the Oldsmobile Jetfire, introduced a few months earlier. The Spyder package was expensive, at \$317.45, but it bumped the Monza engine to 150 gross horsepower. It was a peaky engine, rather flat at both low and high rpm, so it was not quite as fast in the real world as its specifications would imply, but it trimmed 0-60 times to less than 12 seconds and pushed top speed to about 110. *Car & Driver* dubbed it a "Poor Man's Porsche," and its performance wasn't too far off, at about half the price. By 1964 the standard Monza engine had been stroked to 164 cubic inches (2.7L) and 110 hp, which was enough to give 0-60 in a respectable 14 seconds with manual shift, topping out at nearly 100 mph.

The Corvair was completely redesigned for 1965. Under curvaceous new styling, the original handling problems were decisively addressed with an entirely new rear suspension, similar in design to the 1963 Corvette Sting Ray. (The main deviation from Sting Ray practice was the use of coil springs in place of the Corvette's transverse leaf.) The axle half shafts were still hinged at the transaxle, but lower control arms and toe-control lateral links were added to provide better wheel control without the radical camber changes of the early cars. Reviewers unanimously agreed that handling was vastly improved. The unexpected tail slides were now a thing of the past, and testers found it difficult to provoke oversteer without considerable effort. The new Corvair was well-balanced [sic] and quite nimble, further aided by a quicker steering ratio. Even the British magazines, notoriously skeptical of American cars, were appreciative; *Sporting Motorist* said the new car "is transformed into one of the world's best handling saloon cars, irrespective of engine position."

The Spyder was replaced by a new model called Corsa, which had a new engine option (also available on Monzas), featuring *four* carburetors (the only four-carb engine of any postwar American car) and 140 gross horsepower. Top option remained the turbocharged engine, which now claimed 180 hp. 0-60 was now achievable in 10 seconds or less, with a top speed of close to 120 mph. Despite the extra power, highway mileage could still easily top 20 mpg, as good as any American compact of its era.

With gorgeous styling, superb handling, improved brakes, good fuel economy, and enough power to satisfy all but the drag-racing fringe, you would expect that the Corvair would've been a massive hit. '65 sales were indeed up, by a modest 14% over '64, but the game had changed. There was a new player now: the Ford Mustang. The Mustang was about the same size as the Corvair, but conventionally engineered. Moreover, its optional V-8 engines could vacuum the doors off even a turbocharged Corvair. At first GM management thought the Mustang would be a niche product that would be no match for the redesigned Monza and Corsa, but it quickly became clear that the reverse was true. When first-year Mustang sales crossed the half-million mark Chevy decided the Corvair was done for. The word went out to engineering that the car was to receive only whatever minimal changes were necessary to meet federal requirements. No more styling or major mechanical changes were budgeted, and the marketing budget evaporated. Meanwhile, the corporation dusted off plans for a sporty-car version of the conventional Chevy II/Nova, which became the 1967 Camaro.

The second-generation Corvair was left to die of natural causes. The turbocharged engine was dropped after 1966, and the 140-hp engine was briefly cut, as well, although customer demand subsequently restored it to the line-up. The few testers who tried these late Corvairs found assembly quality very poor, another sign of corporate neglect. Left without support, the Corvair bled to death, finally ending production in May 1969. Total sales for the decade-long run were about 1.8 million, a more-than respectable sum for anyone other than GM. Ironically, less than five years after the Corvair's demise Ed Cole, now GM president, remarked that if he still had the Corvair he could sell every one they could build. When buyers shifted again to compact imports in the late 60's and early 70's GM was caught flat-footed. The response was the Vega, which proved to be nearly as ill-starred [sic] (no pun intended) as the Corvair, albeit in different ways.

Contrary to popular belief, Ralph Nader did not kill the Corvair. Bad publicity about the early cars' handling deficiencies may have contributed to the less than robust sales of the second-generation car, but the decision to end development engineering was made more than six months before Nader's tract was published. Indeed, GM probably kept the lines open an extra year or two largely to make clear the Corvair had not been chased from the market by controversy.

The Corvair did become a political lever to bring about safety legislation, the first of which went into effect for the 1968 model year. The requirements for '68 were modest – standard seatbelts, four-way flashers, dual-circuit brake systems -- but by the mid-70's it was no longer possible to design a new car without crumple zones, 5-mph bumpers, and side door beams. None of these things had much to do with the weaknesses of the original Corvair, but it's questionable whether they would have come to pass without the Corvair controversy.

It would seem unfair to call the Corvair a failure -- after all, selling 1,786,243 units is hardly *bad*, particularly in a market whose appetite for genuine eccentricity seldom exceeds the five-figure mark. It would also be wrong to call it a car ahead of its time. Its styling, particularly of the second-generation car, is timeless, but history has not validated its engineering concepts. Turbochargers, certainly, would have their day, starting about a decade after the demise of the Corsa, but rear-engine cars remain rare, as are horizontally opposed engines, and air cooling appears to be extinct.

In the end, the Corvair was not so much revolutionary as simply *contrary*. But, emerging as it did from an era of bulky land yachts that were almost all clumsy, thirsty, and unimaginatively engineered, perhaps that contrariness is itself worthy of celebration. There are still thousands of enthusiastic Corvair fans who [sic] would agree wholeheartedly.

Do to the size of this article, I have had to run it over three, not necessarily consecutive issues, but on the whole I think that it is a good history of the Corvair, although some will disagree with some of the statements made in by the author. Ed.